DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 800 RC 005 954

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TITLE Depreciative Behavior in Forest Campgrounds: An Exploratory Study.
INSTITUTION Forest Service (DOA), Portland, Oreg. Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station.
REPORT NO PNW-161
PUB DATE Aug 71
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; *Camping; Crime; Law Enforcement; *Misbehavior; Parks; *Recreational Activities; Recreationists; Socially Deviant Behavior; Sociology; *Surveys; *Vandalism
IDENTIFIERS Washington State

ABSTRACT

"Vandalism, theft, littering, rule violation, and nuisance behaviors were studied in 3 campgrounds during 1968 using participant observation techniques. Information was gathered on the extent and character of such behaviors and factors associated with their occurrence." Nuisance acts were most common (50%) followed by legal violations (37%) and vandalistic acts (13%). Empirical data based on structural observation schedules indicated a number of factors (entertainment, convenience, disregard, ignorance, and rules interfering with goals) associated with depreciative behavior and possible methods of control (communication of rules, educational programs, and stricter enforcement of regulations). Included are 7 tables and a 5-item reference list. (MJB)

PACIFIC NORTH WEST FOREST AND RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION

USDA FOREST SERVICE RESEARCH NOTE

*PNW-161* *August 1971*

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# DEPRECIATIVE BEHAVIOR IN FOREST CAMPGROUNDS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY[1/]

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*ABSTRACT*

*Vandalism, theft, littering, rule violation, and nuisance behaviors were studied in three campgrounds during 1968 using participant observation techniques. Information was gathered on the extent and character of such behaviors and factors associated with their occurrence. Empirical data based on structured observation schedules indicated a number of factors associated with depreciative behavior and possible methods of control.*

Keywords: Camping, forest recreational use, recreation.

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[1/] Revision of a paper presented to the Northwest Scientific Association, Cheney, Washington, March 22, 1969. Research reported in this paper was conducted under cooperative agreement between the Forest Service and the University of Washington's College of Forest Resources and Institute for Sociological Research.



FOREST SERVICE - US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE - PORTLAND, OREGON

## INTRODUCTION

Human behavior which depreciates the physical and esthetic qualities of the environment in forest recreation areas is an important recreation management problem. Such depreciative behavior frequently results in the theft or damage of property and reduced quality of recreation experiences. Managers and others report rapidly increasing direct costs of replacing stolen or vandalized facilities and maintaining areas that have excessively deteriorated from careless or indifferent use. Less tangible but equally important are the indirect costs of depreciative behavior. Defacement of the natural environment, excessive noise, nuisance behavior, and a variety of major and minor rule violations all detract from recreationists' experiences.

This study was an attempt to: (1) explore--using participant observation techniques--the nature, extent, and possible causes of campground behavior problems and their solutions, and (2) sensitize the researchers to such problems to facilitate designing a larger study (Campbell 1970, Campbell, Hendee and Clark 1969). No specific hypotheses were tested during this study.

Data reported here were collected at Lake Kachess campground in the Wenatchee National Forest, although supplementary data were also collected from Kalalock campground in Olympic National Park and from Lake Chelan (Washington) State Park. Each of these campgrounds is characterized by heavy use, highly developed facilities, opportunity for water-oriented activities, and the presence of resident Rangers.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Systematic participant observation techniques were used to record depreciative behavior without disturbing campers or influencing their actions (Campbell 1970). During the summer of 1968, a team of participant observers camping at the study locations mingled unobtrusively with other campers in selected portions of the campgrounds and systematically noted specific information on all depreciative behavior observed. The data collected included a description and classification of the observed depreciative acts, personal characteristics of the offenders, the apparent cause or motivation for the acts, the reaction of others affected and of nearby campers, official action taken, and the apparent results. The data reflect observed behavior, systematically collected and recorded throughout the range of environments available in the intensively developed campgrounds studied.

In addition to several 1/2-hour scheduled observation periods each day, morning and evening inspections of the campground were conducted. Information was also collected from campground Rangers on other depreciative incidents coming to their attention. Data were collected on more than 400 depreciative acts in the Lake Kachess campground.

The depreciative acts were classified as follows:

*Nuisance acts* reflected behavior essentially a bother or annoyance to other campers which might or might not violate campground rules or other legal restrictions. Examples are excessive noise, violations of privacy (such as unsupervised children running through other parties' camps), and intentionally freeing pets to roam the campground.

*Vandalistic acts* included deliberate, destructive or defacing acts committed against private property, campground facilities, or the surrounding environment.

*Legal violations* were acts which violated campground rules, traffic regulations, and local or State laws.

In the following account, some observed patterns of depreciative behavior involving nuisance acts, vandalism, and legal violations in the Lake Kachess campground are described. Some basic questions considered are: What types of depreciative acts occur and how often? Who commits them? What were offenders doing when the act was committed? What was the apparent reason for the act? Who was affected by the behavior, and how did they react? What official action was taken? How did offenders respond? Answers to these questions are basic both to further study of depreciative behavior and to the design of procedures to control such behavior.

## DISCUSSION

### Types of Depreciative Acts Observed

A wide range of depreciative behavior was observed (table 1). Nuisance acts were the most common type and accounted for 50 percent of all depreciative acts reported. Legal violations were the next most frequent, accounting for about 37 percent, followed by vandalistic acts making up 13 percent of the incidents recorded. Of the nuisance acts observed, almost 80 percent involved pets which were allowed to run loose in the campground or on the beach. The remainder included excessive noise, violations of privacy, sanitary offenses, and hazardous behavior such as throwing rocks in the swimming area when swimmers were present.

Most legal violations involved campground rules, followed by traffic violations and littering. Only a handful of civil law violations was observed. Recorded theft was relatively infrequent but involved expensive items.

About 60 percent of the vandalistic acts were directed at campground facilities, and only 30 percent involved the natural environment. Public, not private, property was usually the target of vandals in the cases observed.

Table 1.--*Types of depreciative acts observed*

| Depreciative act | Number | Percent[1/ 2/] |
|---|---|---|
| Nuisance acts: | | |
| Excessive noise | 12 | 5.8 |
| Health hazard | 12 | 5.8 |
| Unesthetic | 6 | 2.9 |
| Violations of privacy | 12 | 5.8 |
| Pets | 166 | 79.8 |
| Total | 208 | 100.1 (49.9) |
| Vandalism: | | |
| Private property | 5 | 9.1 |
| Campground facilities | 34 | 61.8 |
| Natural environment | 16 | 29.1 |
| Total | 55 | 100.0 (13.2) |
| Law violations: | | |
| Campground rules | 72 | 46.8 |
| Traffic rules | 45 | 29.2 |
| Civil laws | 2 | 1.3 |
| Theft | 4 | 2.6 |
| Littering | 31 | 20.1 |
| Total | 154 | 100.0 (36.9) |
| Total depreciative acts | 417 | 100.0 |

[1/] Numbers in parentheses are percentages of "total depreciative acts."

[2/] Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

## Offenders

There was no clear pattern in the frequency of depreciative acts committed by different types of users (table 2). When it was possible to identify the offenders, it was found that tent campers, trailer campers, and pickup-truck campers committed depreciative acts in roughly the same proportions as they appeared in the campground. Nearly 20 percent of the acts identified by type of visitor were committed by day users, but there was no basis for determining their proportionate attendance in the campground.

Table 2.--*Types of depreciative acts committed by different types of campers*

| Depreciative act[1/] | Tent campers (N=32) | Trailer campers (N=46) | Pickup truck campers (N=16) | Day users (N=21) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Percent[2/]* | | | |
| Nuisance acts | 31.3 | 10.9 | 12.5 | 23.8 |
| Vandalism | 12.5 | 17.4 | 12.5 | 9.5 |
| Rule violations | 56.3 | 71.7 | 75.0 | 66.7 |
| Total depreciative acts[3/] [4/] | 100.1 (26.4) | 100.0 (38.0) | 100.0 (13.2) | 100.0 (17.4) |

[1/] Only those depreciative acts for which "type of camper" could be determined were included in this table.

[2/] Numbers in parentheses are percentages of "total depreciative acts."

[3/] Five percent was attributed to "other" types of users not included in this table.

[4/] Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

The classification of acts committed by different types of users did vary (table 2). For all types of users the most common depreciative acts recorded were rule violations; but these were less frequent among tent campers, who at the same time were reported to commit the highest proportion of nuisance acts.

One unpredicted finding was that there appeared to be no strong relationship between age of camper and incidence of depreciative acts, although age

groups differed somewhat in the types of acts committed (table 3). According to our observations, teenagers most often violated campground rules, including traffic regulations, and were less likely than adults or children to commit nuisance acts.

Table 3.--*Types of depreciative acts committed by different age groups*

| Depreciative act[1/] | Adults (N=197) | Teenagers (N=66) | Children (N=82) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Percent*[2/] | | |
| Nuisance acts | 47.7 | 27.3 | 53.7 |
| Vandalism | 4.6 | 4.5 | 19.5 |
| Law violations | 47.7 | 68.2 | 26.8 |
| Total depreciative acts | 100.0 (57.1) | 100.0 (19.1) | 100.0 (23.8) |

[1/] Only those depreciative acts for which "age group" could be determined were included in this table.

[2/] Numbers in parentheses are percentages of "total depreciative acts."

Children, usually while playing in groups of two or three, were most likely to commit acts of vandalism which were directed primarily at campground facilities. But, the most frequent type of inappropriate behaviors for children were nuisance acts--most often involving pets and violations of privacy.

Adults were most likely to commit nuisance acts or violate rules. When adults were observed in vandalistic acts, they usually involved the natural environment rather than campground facilities, which were the target of children; and these adult acts involved individuals rather than groups.

## Activities Associated With Depreciative Acts

As previously noted, vandalism frequently involved children, which raises a pertinent question. To what extent can such vandalism be regarded as malicious on the part of children? The data indicated that almost all vandalism carried out by children occurred during play. Consequently, boredom, carelessness, or lack of understanding of consequences may be a more important element in certain kinds of vandalism than is malice.

On the other hand, vandalistic acts of adults were often associated with camp chores where appropriate behavior stymied their completion. For example, adults gathering wood often damaged both natural environment and camp facilities. Here, indifference to consequences and to inconvenient laws may be the primary determinant of vandalism among adults.

Finally, approximately one-third of all vandalistic acts occurred while campers were actually attempting to enjoy the natural environment (table 4). The target was most often campground facilities rather than the natural environment, which campers attempted to manipulate inquisitively or to facilitate their activity. For example, interpretive signs and fences on the nature trail were often damaged when parents allowed their children to climb on them.

Table 4.--*Associated activity when depreciative acts were committed*

| Depreciative act[1/] | Entertainment | Camp chores | Nature study | Social interaction | Moving through camp | Total[2/] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Percent* | | | | | |
| Nuisance acts (N=111) | 52.3 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 20.7 | 18.0 | 100.0 |
| Vandalism (N=28) | 39.3 | 25.0 | 35.7 | 0 | 0 | 100.0 |
| Law violations (N=132) | 27.3 | 33.3 | 1.5 | 10.6 | 27.3 | 100.0 |
| Total depreciative acts (N=271) | 38.7 | 20.7 | 6.3 | 13.7 | 20.7 | 100.1 |

[1/] Only those depreciative acts where "associated activity" could be determined were included in this table.

[2/] Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

This general pattern held for rule violations and nuisance acts, that is, they were committed incidental to other activities such as doing camp chores, playing, or walking through the campground. Campers involved in such chores as setting up camp or disposing of waste materials frequently violated campground rules. Littering occurred while people were walking through camp, sunbathing or swimming, or during social interaction with other campers.

Traffic violations usually involved motorbikes rather than cars, and usually during their use for sport rather than for necessary transportation. Pets were often unleashed to accompany campers on a walk or to ease the burden of tending to them.

Reasons for Committing Depreciative Acts

The observed depreciative acts are classified in table 5 as to their apparent motivation, i.e., whether they appeared to be committed for entertainment, for convenience, as sheer disregard for rules and effects on others, due to ignorance of rules, or because rules interfered with some desired goal. Most of the nuisance acts, especially those involving pets, stemmed from ignorance of rules; but others, such as excessive noise, violations of privacy by children, and rock throwing, appeared to be deliberate disregard of the effects on others.

Table 5.--*Apparent motivation for depreciative acts*

| Depreciative act[1/] | Entertainment | Convenience | Disregard | Ignorance | Rules interfere with goal | Total[2/] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Percent* | | | |
| Nuisance acts (N=119) | 16.0 | 5.0 | 14.3 | 64.7 | 0 | 100.0 |
| Vandalism (N=31) | 32.3 | 6.5 | 45.2 | 16.1 | 0 | 100.1 |
| Law violations (N=120) | 16.7 | 10.0 | 47.5 | 6.7 | 19.2 | 100.1 |
| Total depreciative acts (N=270) | 17.9 | 7.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 8.4 | 100.2 |

[1/] Only those depreciative acts where "apparent motivation" could be determined were included in this table.

[2/] Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

Vandalism of camp facilities most often reflected disregard, but almost one-fourth of these acts seemed to be for entertainment. On the other hand, vandalism of the natural environment, such as chopping on trees in the campground, was most often for entertainment and to a lesser extent due to ignorance of rules or the consequences of the act.

Rule violations were usually the result of sheer disregard of known regulations and are illustrated by littering. However, there were a number of incidents where rules were violated because they interfered with other desired goals. For example, a full campground often invited camping in the picnic area, and visiting friends often resulted in more than one group at a campsite.

Campground facilities, the natural environment, and people all suffered from the depreciative behavior observed (table 6). Nuisance behavior, by definition, affected people almost exclusively.

Table 6.--*Victims of depreciative acts*

| Depreciative act | People | Private property | Public property | Natural environment | Rules | Total[1/] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Percent* | | | |
| Nuisance acts (N=204) | 98.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 100.0 |
| Vandalism (N=51) | 0 | 2.0 | 66.7 | 31.4 | 0 | 100.1 |
| Law violations (N=146) | 21.9 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 44.5 | 30.1 | 100.0 |
| Total depreciative acts (N=401) | 57.7 | 1.0 | 9.5 | 20.4 | 11.4 | 100.0 |

[1/] Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

Two-thirds of the time, vandalism affected campground facilities. Of the remaining, almost one-third was of the natural environment, with private property involved in very few cases.

Rule violations, especially littering, impinged on the natural environment in almost half the cases; but in another third, objection to the rules themselves seemed to be the object of the act--especially campground and traffic rules which campers did not seem to think were legitimate. Violation of civil, traffic, and campground rules impinged directly upon other people in about 20 percent of the cases recorded.

## Reactions of Bystanders

More than 80 percent of the depreciative acts observed were committed when other people were around (table 7). In more than 90 percent of these

Table 7.--*Reaction of bystanders to depreciative acts*

| Depreciative act[1/] | No one around | Approved of act | No reaction | Ignored act | Commented to others | Notified Ranger later | Notified Ranger immediately | Confronted offender | Total[2/] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Percent* | | | | | | | | |
| Nuisance acts (N=197) | 9.1 | 0.5 | 78.7 | 2.5 | 4.6 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 4.1 | 100.0 |
| Vandalism (N=34) | 52.9 | 0 | 44.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 99.9 |
| Law violations (N=140) | 17.9 | 1.4 | 65.7 | 4.3 | 8.6 | .7 | .7 | .7 | 100.0 |
| Total depreciative acts (N=371) | 17.1 | .8 | 70.1 | 2.9 | 5.6 | .5 | .5 | 2.4 | 99.9 |

1/ Only those depreciative acts for which "reaction" could be determined were included in this table.

2/ Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

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cases, no perceptible reaction by adjacent campers could be observed. People either ignored or were indifferent to the act or did not see anything happen.

In the small percentage of cases where there was some reaction by onlookers, they most commonly commented to other people about the incident. In a few cases, people were obviously upset but took no action. Even when acts of vandalism were committed in view of adjacent campers, remedial action was observed only once. In this case, the camper summoned a Ranger.

In total, other people were impinged upon in about 60 percent of all depreciative incidents observed. But, it appears that their indifferences creates a climate where depreciative behavior can and will occur with little consequence to the offender.

## OFFICIAL ACTION--OFFENDER'S REACTION

Rangers were in the immediate vicinity during less than 90 percent of the depreciative incidents observed. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that they had a large territory to cover. Data are insufficient to support or reject the notion that the presence of Rangers is a deterrent to depreciative behavior, although it is logical that this is true. In the few occasions Rangers were present, they took one of four steps, varying with the seriousness of the act. They either did nothing or reacted by attempting to educate the offender, warning him not to repeat the act and making him rectify the situation, or issuing a citation.

In most cases where a Ranger did act, the offender was cooperative. Indifferent or uncooperative behavior was infrequent and only when the offender was reprimanded for violation of campground rules. In these cases, violators complied with the Ranger's instructions about two-thirds of the time. Repetition of the act was more common than was complaining after confrontation with the Ranger and usually was associated with violation of campground and traffic rules. It appeared that repeated violation reflected camper judgments that the rules were either unnecessary or interfered with other recreational activities or goals.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE DATA

Depreciative acts are apparently committed for a variety of reasons; and several approaches seem logical for their control, including better communication of rules, educational programs to increase the campers' awareness of the consequences of certain acts, and stricter enforcement of regulations. The data suggest, contrary to some prevailing opinion, that depreciative behavior is not always the result of "slobism" (Frome 1969) or vandals running wild (Bennett 1969) in outdoor recreation areas.

These observations indicate that all campers share responsibility for depreciative behavior. Again, contrary to popular belief evident in some popular literature (Bennett 1969), teenagers did not commit a disproportionate amount of depreciative acts. Instead, preteenage children in groups of two or three appeared to be the primary cause of much expensive damage to facilities. This suggests that stricter supervision of children by parents might eliminate much of the expensive vandalism.

The data suggest that rules intended to control certain types of unwanted behavior in campgrounds must be clearly analyzed as to their specific intent and their effects on recreational activity before they are put into effect. If the public cannot see their worth and underlying rationale, then they will most likely be violated. The public needs to be educated as to why there are rules and why depreciative behavior is inappropriate in campgrounds.

Finally, the data indicate that people will cooperate when challenged by a Ranger if he explains the situation. It seems likely, therefore, that the public will support attempts to reduce depreciative behavior if it understands the underlying reasons.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

As indicated early in this paper, these results are suggestive--not conclusive. The objective was to sensitize the researchers to campground behavior problems by collecting systematic, but not necessarily representative, data describing the character of depreciative behavior in a forest campground. Such data are useful in formulating propositions, hypotheses, and generalizations to be tested in further research. In addition, in many cases, the data collected contradict prevailing folklore and belief about the nature and cause of campground depreciative behavior.

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